Constantine Pollak

Dr. Grace Ward

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Background Statement

My education experience was largely a positive one, which likely plays a part in why I want to be an educator. I was fortunate enough to have parents that highly valued education and were able to provide my sisters and I with quality resources. My mother ran a daycare, so I always had access to lots of books, puzzles, and peers willing to play any sort of game. Even with all the socializing I got at what I would consider home, I got even more at preschool, where I first met someone my age that could read. Years later I found out she was actually nearly a year older than me, but it was that early revelation that made me determined to learn how to read. Public education was a positive experience for me from the start, with an amazing teacher, the aptly named, Mrs. Friend.

From what I can recall, there was never pressure from the school system to do exceptionally well, but there was certainly the expectation that we would graduate high school, and to nearly the same degree, the expectation that we would pursue some form of postsecondary education. I would say that stance was reflected in my parents as well, who wanted me to do my best in school, but didn't care if that was *the* best. Both of my parents attended college, and there was an unspoken expectation that my sisters and I would attend college as well. Cumberland has very few businesses in the town, nearly all of which are locally owned, so the expectations of businesses are really the shared expectations of the town, which were mirrored in the school system. For better or worse, a student failing to graduate high school was almost unthinkable by anyone in the community, and I assumed no less of myself.

My classes were arranged in a variety of ways throughout the years. From what I can recall of elementary school, desks were usually arranged into groups of four, and we would be rotated throughout the year. Once middle school came around there was more variation between teachers, with some preferring rows of desks facing the front, others favoring a large semicircle of desks, and still others created their own unique arrangements. I don't remember many specific activities or strategies, but I do recall read aloud occurring regularly until middle school. In fifth grade I experienced a form of team teaching, with the majority of my day being spent in one class with Mr. Brooks. Our classes would switch rooms entirely for us to get math instruction from Mrs. Alexander, and I believe her class was being taught English from Mr. Brooks. The classes also shared read aloud, as the teachers alternated reading to the combined group throughout the year.

When it came to high school my English classes were largely discussion based, and all other content areas were largely lecture based. My success in the lecture based classes was mostly contingent on my interest level of the content, and from what I've heard from my friends, their experiences were very similar, yet their interest levels were often lower than mine. Across the board I enjoyed my classes with discussion more, because I was able to share my thoughts and get feedback from my teachers and peers. In my classes with lots of lecturing I often found myself getting caught on an idea and exploring that in my head, while ignoring the rest of the instruction. I was definitely most successful in classes that I had opportunities to quickly address the questions and ideas I had during a lesson.

I had many favorite teachers throughout the years, but probably my favorite among them was my high school English teacher, Mr. Mothes, who I had Honors English 10 and senior year of IB English with. Mr. Mothes gave us lots of opportunities to discuss the readings, and we would often read sections out loud, or work in groups to explore specific aspects of a text. His enthusiasm for the material and subject definitely contributed to my enjoyment of what I was learning, and to my motivation level in his classes. Adversely, my least favorite teacher, who will remain nameless, I perceived as having little interest in the subject they taught, as well as a lack of mastery. From these and similar experiences I know that personally I learn best and am most motivated by teachers that are passionate about their subjects, no matter what subject that is.

Once classes began being tracked, I was largely on the higher tracks, although over the course of my high school career I took science, math and social studies at the CP, honors and IB levels, with English being the only subject I took consistently at its highest levels offered. Because I had classes at many levels, I got to step out of the bubble of high achievers that rarely saw academics as a chore. Overall I think my different class levels helped me to see some of the struggles in teaching students with wildly differing levels of participation. My own struggles with motivation also give me some insight into what may or may not be demotivating my students. Still, my experiences are my own, and I know my struggles won't be the same as many of my students' struggles, and I will need to be a responsive teacher to address them. I think the piece from my experience with education that I believe to be the most shared among students, is that I highly valued teachers who loved what they taught, and were excited to teach it to us. The enthusiasm of those teachers could not be ignored, and it helped to motivate the entire class.

Being enthusiastic for my subject won't be hard for me, as I truly do love English, but what isn't always as easy is translating that enthusiasm to the students, and getting them to recognize it's authenticity. That leads me to another major facet of my developing philosophy, which is having students know that I'm honest in what I say and that I genuinely care about their success in life, no matter what path they choose. Part of that will come from quality and timely feedback, and from upholding the promises I make to my students. It's incredibly important for me to have mutual respect with my students, but I know that in many cases I will have to earn theirs, and I need them to know that they don't have to earn mine, because I will always treat my students with respect, no matter their feelings towards me.

Seemingly ages ago, when I was being told to decide what I wanted to do with my life, what drove me towards teaching was my love for writing and literature. I don't think that's a bad reason to want to teach, but since making that decision I've realized there are so many more reasons why I want to teach. I really enjoy helping others and I think teaching is one of the best ways to do that, and the best way to help people to help themselves. One of my main goals as an educator will be to help my students become global citizens, and productive members of society. I want my students to recognize their own value and the value of others around them.

It's hard for me to define a single fear, not because I don't have any, but because it's just such a general fear of failure. I fear that my lessons will fall flat, and I won't be able to engage my students. I fear that I'll sound too convoluted when I try to help my students. I fear that only those already headed towards success will be successful in my class, and I will just push middle and lower achievers onward. I fear that I won't challenge my students enough. I fear that my theory won't transition into practice. Clearly, I have a lot of fears, but I also have an incredible determination to succeed at teaching. I've honestly never felt determination like this in my life, and when I truly consider the anxieties I have about the future, it's a very reassuring sensation.